



History of Education

Journal of the History of Education Society

ISSN: 0046-760X (Print) 1464-5130 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/thed20>

The strange death of UK civil defence education in the 1980s

John Preston

To cite this article: John Preston (2015) The strange death of UK civil defence education in the 1980s, *History of Education*, 44:2, 225-242, DOI: [10.1080/0046760X.2014.979253](https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2014.979253)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2014.979253>



© 2014 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 17 Dec 2014.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 413



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

The strange death of UK civil defence education in the 1980s

John Preston*

Cass School of Education and Communities, University of East London, London, UK

(Received 20 January 2014; accepted 28 September 2014)

In the cold war, the United Kingdom government devised a number of public education campaigns to inform citizens about the precautions that they should undertake in the event of a nuclear attack. One such campaign, *Protect and Survive*, was released to the general public and media in May 1980. The negative publicity this publication received is considered to be a reason why a successor publication was never released despite the increased risk of nuclear attack. Using recently released records from the UK National Archives the paper considers that, aside from this explanation, interlocking institutional objectives, rather than simply inertia, provide an explanation for this hiatus.

Keywords: civil defence; disaster education; path dependency; United Kingdom

Introduction

The history of education policy is mostly concerned with changes to formal education systems. Much research has been attentive to schools, higher education, vocational education and (less frequently) lifelong learning. However, nation-states engage in other types of educative activity outside of the formal sphere. One such activity is education for emergency and disaster situations that call the survival of the nation into question.¹ Whilst sometimes called public information, or propaganda, such information has an explicit pedagogical function. Indeed, in some countries such as the United States and Japan these forms of education have been linked directly to schools. The infamous ‘Duck and Cover’ drill that American schoolchildren undertook in the 1950s is the best remembered and most iconic of these.² Even where these activities are not tied to formal education they have an explicitly educative function drawing on forms of pedagogy and using instructional techniques. Sandlin et al.³ consider forms of pedagogy that exist in the public sphere for political purposes are forms of public pedagogy. This nomenclature fits emergency education well as its function is political, as well as educative.

This paper is concerned with a particular period in public education in the United Kingdom when there was inertia, hiatus and silence by the state on preparing the

*Email: j.j.preston@uel.ac.uk

¹Richard Aldrich, ‘Education for Survival’, *History of Education* 39, no. 1 (2010): 1–14 considers that the needs of education need to be repurposed for global survival. This article considers education for national survival in a particular historical context.

²*Duck and Cover*. Directed by Thomas Craven. New York: Archer Productions, 1952.

³Jennifer Sandlin, Jake Burdick and Brian Schultz, eds., *Handbook of Public Pedagogy* (London: Routledge, 2009).

public for emergencies. The 1980s, the 'hot cold war', was a time of considerable geopolitical tension when the possibility of a nuclear war was as high as at any time since the Cuban missile crisis. The United States and Russia both possessed extensive arsenals of rapid-deployment ICBMs (Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles) on a hair-trigger alert system. A number of real incidents, misunderstandings and accidents brought the superpowers increasingly closer to a nuclear conflict. The shooting down of a Korean airliner in 1983, the perception by the Soviet Union that the US was preparing for a nuclear attack and numerous 'false alerts' meant that the doomsday clock (which indicates the probability of a nuclear war) was closer to midnight than ever before.⁴ Popular culture was saturated with nuclear anxiety. Films depicting the horrors of nuclear attack such as *Threads*⁵ in the United Kingdom and *The Day After*⁶ in the United States gained huge public interest. Resistance to government nuclear civil defence was evident through the actions of CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), local government nuclear-free zones and publications critical of government policy.⁷ There was real public anxiety concerning the possibility of a nuclear attack, and the lack of workable civil defence in preparing for this. In 1985, the Central Office of Information (COI) considered, in drawing together results from the main polls on civil defence, that around 40% of all adults believed a nuclear war 'is likely someday' but most people (around 80%) were pessimistic about their chances of survival and most thought civil defence would make no or little difference to their chances.⁸ Focus groups conducted by the COI also considered that the public desired an honest approach on behalf of government to civil defence issues around nuclear war.⁹

In this tense atmosphere there is a question of why there was a hiatus in mass disaster education in the United Kingdom between the, almost embarrassed, public release of *Protect and Survive*¹⁰ and the national issue of a pamphlet for emergency preparation, unconnected with nuclear war in 2004, *Preparing for Emergencies*.¹¹ Despite a few minor attempts to revive a form of civil defence in the 1980s there was, seemingly, no public effort by government to reconsider nuclear civil defence in a time of both public and popular cultural interest and at a time of real threat. Why is it, then, that the government kept a very low profile in terms of civil defence education during the 1980s? A number of theories considering this issue from the perspective of government arise from the work of Matthew Grant¹² and Peter Hennessy.¹³ Both Hennessy and Grant consider that the Home Office wished to produce defensible plans for *Protect and Survive* that were politically expedient. In

⁴David. E. Hoffman, *The Dead Hand: Reagan, Gorbachev and the Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

⁵*Threads*. Directed by Barry Hines. London: BBC Worldwide DVD, 2005.

⁶*The Day After*. Directed by Nicholas Meyer. London: Fremantle DVD, 2002.

⁷Richard Taylor, 'The Labour Party and CND: 1957–1984', in *Campaign for Peace: British Peace Movements in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Richard Taylor and Nigel Young (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 100–130.

⁸COI report from May 17, 1985 on market research (Central Office of Information files, National Archives, INF6/3490).

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰HMSO, *Protect and Survive* (London: HMSO, 1980).

¹¹Cabinet Office, *Preparing for Emergencies* (London HMSO, 2004).

¹²Matthew Grant, *After the Bomb: Civil Defence and Nuclear War in Cold War Britain, 1945–1968* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009).

¹³Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (London: Penguin, 2003).

doing so there was a dual purpose for civil defence. On the one hand, the government had to produce very detailed, and workable, plans for the continuity of the British state. For Grant this was the 'first sphere' of civil defence, as opposed to the 'second sphere' for the protection of the general public. The main priority for producing advice for the 'second sphere' was that it should be politically defensible, rather than it should necessarily be of practical use.

Conceptually, the pause in the publication of emergency educational advice for the public in the 1980s could support a 'punctuated equilibrium'¹⁴ model of path dependence where institutional inertia means that only exogenous shocks are powerful enough to bring about change.¹⁵ However, this analysis masks the underlying dynamics and conflicts that were occurring at the time within and between government departments and civil society. A more useful starting point in understanding inertia through interlocking institutional aims is through the work of Kathleen Thelen.¹⁶ Thelen, in terms of vocational education, provides a useful theorisation of educational inertia that is free of some of the deterministic assumptions of other theories of path dependence. She describes some theories of path dependence as being wholly dependent on a theorisation of strong institutional inertia with exogenous shocks being the sole cause of change. Thelen considers that, often, institutional arrangements are so locked in that they are not subject to change even given exogenous shocks.

In this paper I consider the institutional factors accounting for inertia in UK civil defence education in the 1980s. The research is based on recently released, and until now unanalysed, files in the National Archives, from various UK government departments, that provide an insight into the ways in which policy and practice was constrained by a number of institutional factors. The account is not one that categorises the civil service as being a naturally conservative and reactionary force. Rather it shows a civil service where individuals were anxious to make progress on this matter, albeit for reasons of political expediency, but where the opposing institutional forces were strong enough to produce a policy vacuum in terms of civil defence education. It is a good example of the way in which Thelen stresses the ways that power is distributed between institutional actors, and shows how the coalitional political forces on which institutional action is founded are subject to change. Moreover, she stresses changes that can occur due to alterations in coalitional politics. So whilst the period may seem to be one of hiatus it was actually one in which there were significant underlying shifts in British disaster education, at least in terms of the Home Office's desire to continue with a policy of public education for nuclear war.

Methodology

The methodology for this paper is based on an archival approach that considers not micro-actors but the discourses and arguments used by institutions. It takes as the unit of analysis government departments, local government and non-governmental bodies (such as CND). The reason for this choice is primarily due to the theoretical model

¹⁴Stephen Krasner, 'Approaches to the State: Alternative Conceptions and Historical Dynamics', *Comparative Politics* 16, no. 2 (1984): 223–46.

¹⁵Matthew Lange, *Comparative Historical Methods* (London: Sage, 2013).

¹⁶Kathleen Thelen, *How Institutions Evolve: The Political Economy of Skills in Germany, Britain, the United States and Japan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

considered, being Thelen's institutional model of path dependence. It is not that individuals are unimportant but rather that the analysis of individual decisions (within an institutional context) would allow one to consider a different level of analysis. There is also a correspondence between the ways in which archives are constructed that makes it more difficult to ascertain micro political factors such as individual behaviour. Although archives have been used to analyse the micro-decisions of individuals, these individuals often speak 'on behalf' of their institutions. In addition, the institution is often personified and it is not infrequent to find statements in the archives containing remarks such as 'The Foreign and Commonwealth Office said...' or 'The Ministry of Defence said...'.¹⁷ The particular archive consulted, the National Archive of the United Kingdom, is also organised into government department files, which tends to privilege institutional analysis.

The analysis was conducted through locating archives from particular series appropriate to the research question. These are predominantly the HO files from the Home Office (particularly those files beginning HO322), the INF files from the Central Office of Information and other HMSO publications such as *Protect and Survive* and *Domestic Nuclear Shelters*. A thematic approach to research was undertaken. The first theme was the future development of *Protect and Survive*, examining the ways in which it was developed, altered, resisted, subverted and revised. The second theme was accommodation to this process. Archival sections were transcribed and then distributed according to different themes. From this analysis, three themes emerged explaining this external inertia and these are considered here.

Mapping UK disaster education since 1960: the politics of public information

Before examining the reasons for the civil defence 'hiatus' in the 1980s, it is important to consider the positioning of *Protect and Survive* in the wider context of UK public education for emergencies more generally. In the United Kingdom a number of public education campaigns were considered to protect the general population in an emergency involving a devastating nuclear attack and the collapse of the national infrastructure. These campaigns are not just educational, but also exist as examples of public pedagogy,¹⁸ the explicit use of public education for political purposes. In each of these campaigns, the emphasis was on documents that would be politically palatable, and defensible, rather than necessarily of practical use to the public in an emergency. In some senses, the main function of the public information would have been to aid social control in a crisis to keep households occupied and indoors, away from the mobilisation caused by transition to war.

The first post-war mass public education campaign called *Advising the Householder on Protection against Nuclear Attack*¹⁹ used both cinema/television advertising and information booklets to propagate its message. The campaign was, aside from a small number of booklets, not immediately available to the general public but was to be distributed in times of crisis. The advice was aimed largely at families and involved a strategy of shelter in place, constructing an inner shelter using

¹⁷Home Defence Planning Sub-committee, December 14, 1982 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/998).

¹⁸Sandlin et al., *Handbook of Public Pedagogy*.

¹⁹Home Office, *Advising the Householder on Protection against Nuclear Attack* (London: Home Office: 1963).

available materials, and stockpiling food and other resources. Similarly, the second public education campaign *Protect and Survive* was largely secret and featured similar advice to shelter in place and to construct household shelters. The similarity between the two campaigns is striking, and even stretches to the use of comparable graphics and phrases in the two booklets. Even though the format of the related films was different (with *Advising the Householder* using actors and *Protect and Survive* animation) the messages and the structure of the films, with frequent repetition, were similar. The advice given in 1963 in the *Householders Handbook* to stay indoors is in correspondence with *Protect and Survive* in 1980 ('stay at home', or as policy makers called it 'stay put') and is not unlike the advice of *Preparing for Emergencies* in 2004 ('Go home, stay in, tune in'). However, the campaigns were not identical. *Advising the Householder* was slightly more social in its orientation with reference to a 'warden' or 'street party leader' whereas *Protect and Survive* was almost entirely focused on the household. In addition, the 1963 publication did allow for a(n) (unlikely) strategy of mass evacuation whereas the 1980 publication did not. It was only with the end of the cold war in the late 1980s and with the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001 that the UK started to produce radically different forms of emergency education. First, a number of campaigns focused on specific areas or groups in the UK at risk (such as those at risk of flooding). Second, *Preparing for Emergencies* in 2004, which was in the public domain and identified a number of hazards. These later publications retained a political function. Despite its supposed 'all hazards' approach, *Preparing for Emergencies* had a particular emphasis on international terrorism, rather than natural hazards.

After *Protect and Survive*: producing a 'defensible' document

In earlier work²⁰ I considered the pedagogical nature of the government's public education campaign *Protect and Survive*. This was largely a didactic educational campaign that used 'surge pedagogy', last-minute education in the run-up to a nuclear attack, to inform the public. The campaign used a variety of media modes such as television, radio, booklets and newspaper inserts. The television campaigns employed stylised forms of animation to instruct families to construct their own shelter and survival arrangements. The guidance gave generic instructions on how to construct tools and techniques for survival. This information advised the citizen/family as not necessarily an 'active' learner but attempted to instil 'action' into the citizen/family to follow the instructions given. The basis of *Protect and Survive* was that people should stay at home, construct a shelter within their house, take heed of warnings and prepare to remain in shelter for an extended period of time following a nuclear attack.

The development and public reception of *Protect and Survive* was an uncomfortable process for the UK government. This publication was, to some extent, a 'fantasy document' that placed responsibility on the householder.²¹ The nature of the advice offered (stay at home, and assumptions about property and resource) produced not only a cynical attitude amongst the public but would also, in practice, have led to huge inequities in terms of patterns of survival.²² Civil servants were acutely aware of these equity issues but ultimately the requirement for a document

²⁰John Preston, *Disaster Education* (London: Springer, 2013).

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*

on civil defence to exist was necessary to justify the government's policy of independent nuclear weapons. Political priorities overwhelmed the need to fully calibrate Protect and Survive and it was produced largely as a public relations exercise. Protect and Survive was always considered to be for release in the final days before a nuclear exchange rather than as a public document. The public, media and some politicians, though, thought that it should be openly available to the public and it was made available publicly (rather than to those involved in the emergency services) in May 1980. The reaction to its publication was primarily negative, with organisations such as CND using it to discredit the government's civil defence policy. Indeed, the views of CND at this time were entirely congruent with the opinions of the population as a whole. Rather than being seen as a counter-cultural force, CND articulated the views of a sizeable proportion of the population, at least in terms of the utility of civil defence. After the discovery of Protect and Survive, CND quickly produced an oppositional parody called *Protest and Survive*²³ and mainstream public mockery and criticism of Protect and Survive was widespread following its release. The BBC film *Threads*,²⁴ which was shown in 1984, showed that much advice provided to the public in Protect and Survive would have no impact on survival chances and that those who did not suffer a short and painful death would die in agony of radiation sickness or trauma, and that the country would, in a number of generations, descend into medieval barbarism.

Despite this negative reception, the Home Office was convinced that it should create a successor to Protect and Survive, which would deal with the perceived inadequacies in the early publication and be politically expedient. Protect and Survive had failed in its objective of convincing the general public that civil defence was viable. Alongside the development of a communal shelter policy, the UK government considered a 'rewrite' of the much lambasted Protect and Survive. This booklet was to be larger than the original:

Unlike 'Protect and Survive', the new booklet will be for peacetime sale only, and its size increased to 70 pages. For crisis information we will rely on material drawn from the new booklet, prepared for newspaper copy and for TV and radio broadcast.²⁵

The revised version of Protect and Survive would consist of 19 'sequences' (probably short public information films, or announcements) for TV and radio covering methods of attack/warning sounds, conventional weapons, chemical weapons, nuclear attack, planning a survival kit, wartime broadcasting and regional government, caring for the sick and injured and disposal of the dead.²⁶

There were key differences between this new version of Protect and Survive and the previous publication.

First, rather than to 'stay at home' the advice was amended to include the possibility of taking shelter communally. This was in contrast to much of the advice issued during the cold war when the UK government largely pursued an individualised policy in terms of population protection whereby individuals would

²³E.P. Thompson, *Protest and Survive* (London: CND and Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, 1980).

²⁴*Threads*. Barry Hines, 2005.

²⁵Home Office letter of November 12, 1981 on Protect and Survive (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/980).

²⁶Draft of revised version of Protect and Survive, undated (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/980).

be responsible for their own shelter arrangements. The exception to this was those individuals who were in the 'first sphere' of civil defence protection, who, because of an essential, privileged role in the government, nationalised industry or private sector, would receive extensive protection by the state.²⁷ In the 'hot cold war' of the 1980s there was some debate in UK government as to whether communal shelter provision for the population should be provided. In a key Home Office circular²⁸ it was proposed that a mapping of UK buildings would take place at local authority level to consider the PF (protective factor) of UK buildings and structures against nuclear attack. Only substantive buildings with a PF of 45–65 were considered to be of the 'basic standard' required for survival. Planning for the population involved the aggregation of individual needs for 'bare life' and habitation of up to 14 days following a nuclear attack (although other methods of attack such as chemical and conventional weapons were considered) including essentials such as water (2 litres/person/day minimum) and food stocks (2000 calories/person/day). In this revised document there is attention paid to communal sheltering:

The circular envisaged that encouragement of local sharing and a 'good neighbour' attitude would go some way to assist those who had inadequate protection either at home or at work.²⁹

In planning for the collapse of infrastructure the communal shelters would have to provide for their own needs and so plans were expected to cover 'regimes' for eating and sleeping and nuclear and conventional attack, management and control, appointment of shelter management and staff, information systems within shelters, morale and discipline, radiation monitoring, sign posting and advice to occupants on entry and exit. One infrastructure that was particularly considered for communal shelter was the London Underground.³⁰ It was considered that converting seven deep shelters already on the tube network could shelter 8000 people at a cost of £1 million/shelter for protection against nuclear weapons and £800,000 for protection against conventional weapons. In practice, such planning efforts for communal shelters were logistically impossible given the resources required to scope them, the viability of suitable locations, and the unwillingness of local authorities to conduct such exercises.³¹ In addition, the concentrated targeting of Soviet missiles to the UK would have made survival impossible in other than the most remote, hardened, deep shelters. As recently declassified documents have shown, in many ways the placement of nuclear missiles in Europe was to 'draw fire' away from United States missile sites by increasing the number of targets in Europe, which made the possibility of surviving an enormous nuclear strike on the UK highly unlikely.³²

Second, the booklet would follow the simple and graphical approach of *Protect and Survive* in a crisis but with some attention paid to more technical language

²⁷ Grant, *After the Bomb*.

²⁸ Draft of ES/1981, 1981 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/980).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Report by the Home Office Group on Domestic Shelters on London Deep Tube Shelters (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/980).

³¹ Letters from local authorities (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/997).

³² Eric Schlosser, *Command and Control* (London: Penguin, 2013).

where it was necessary to make the argument for civil defence.³³ The revised version of Protect and Survive would focus not just on nuclear weapons and their effects (perhaps because mitigating against these was almost impossible) but also conventional and chemical weapons. It would be 70 pages, for sale in peacetime, and from which material for newspaper copy and TV and radio broadcast would be drawn. The aim of the updated Protect and Survive was to 'ensure that civil defence arrangements are coherent and defensible'.³⁴ There is some acknowledgement that Protect and Survive and associated policies, such as the expensive private shelter construction guidance given in *Domestic Nuclear Shelters*,³⁵ were inadequate and that provision should be made for the disabled.³⁶

The Home Office circular ES/1981³⁷ also considered that many households (at least 15% of the population) lived in 'poorly protected accommodation' where there would be little chance of surviving a nuclear attack and/or subsequent fallout. This again is a move away from the Protect and Survive policy, which largely assumed a reasonable amount of protection could be maintained by a policy of 'stay at home'. This raised the issue of allocation of places in communal shelters, which had always been a thorny problem in civil defence planning. In the Home Office circular ES/1981 there was consideration of the 'method of allocation for shelter places'. There was an assumption that in the allocation of places families should have first consideration, followed by local workers and finally those made homeless by the attack. Here was a clear shift away from the advice in Protect and Survive, moving towards protecting those members of the public in the most vulnerable accommodation:

Clearly members of the public who are shown by the protective qualities of dwelling survey to be in accommodation offering the least protection against radiation, together with those furthest from their homes or places of work, would be in need of the protection offered. ... It is desirable that the 'allocation' of places is seen as broadly equitable; the 'Protect and Survive' measures are under review, and the revised material may help in this respect through improved advice.³⁸

It was also considered that the updated version of Protect and Survive could include sections on 'voluntary organisations/neighbours/police; civil defence now and in war; arrangements for the old and disabled'.³⁹ This desire to include advice for certain groups (older people and the disabled) as well as voluntary organisations and neighbours shows a desire both for equity and for altruism outside of the family unit. There is also guidance for people requiring 'special foods', such as nursing mothers and diabetics. The consideration that volunteers should be able to cater for

³³Letter from the Home Office to the Department of the Environment, November 12, 1981 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/980). Letter from the Scottish Home and Health Department to the Home Office (Working Group on Shelters) (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/980).

³⁴Letter sent by the Home Office on November 12, 1981 to the Department of the Environment (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/980).

³⁵HMSO, *Domestic Nuclear Shelters* (Government pamphlet) (London: Home Office, 1981).

³⁶Letter from South Oxfordshire District Council to the Secretary of State, December 19, 1981 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/980).

³⁷Draft of ES/1981 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/980).

³⁸Paragraph 4.3.1 of the draft guidance in ES/1981 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/980).

³⁹Comments of Major Smeeth, minutes of meeting held at Queen Anne's Gate on October 15, 1981 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/980).

such groups seems impracticable, particularly as civil defence volunteering was, by the 1980s, practically non-existent, having suffered a rapid post-war decline.⁴⁰

Despite this desire for a new and innovative successor to *Protect and Survive*, in practice this did not happen. Some of the explanation for this can be found in terms of the difficulties of reaching a politically viable document within the Home Office itself and the process was one of compromise and eventual standstill.⁴¹ In November 1981 a briefing paper for ministers was prepared, entitled *Review of Home Defence Planning*, by the F6⁴² division, which summed up the desire for change:

The pamphlet 'Protect and Survive', which was put on sale in May 1980 continues to draw criticism from some quarters. Its contents are being reviewed to take into account the threat of conventional war including the possible use of chemical weapons, and protection against them within the home. The new version, which is expected to be available by the summer of 1983, will include advice on health matters, injuries and sickness and describe the symptoms of radiation sickness. It will also emphasise the need for mutual help and community care arrangements in civil defence planning. A free pamphlet 'Civil Defence – why we need it', published on 10 November 1981, was prepared to clear up some common misconceptions about civil defence and its value to the United Kingdom.⁴³

Despite this apparent release date of 1983, as this approached the plans for the successor were scaled back to become not a public education campaign but a 'briefing pack' for emergency planners and ministers.⁴⁴ As will be considered, there were moves by the Ministry of Defence to delay the production of a new version of *Protect and Survive*:

Your suggested publication date of October will fall close to large Autumn demonstrations by CND and others and talk of 'planning to fight a nuclear war' can be expected. This will hardly have a beneficial effect in the period running up to cruise missile deployment later this year. I would therefore like to see it come out a little later.⁴⁵

Although a briefing pack was produced in time for parliamentary debate on 12 October 1983 and there were plans to produce a more extensive public education campaign in 1984, in actuality this did not appear. There are references in 1985 to further plans for a 'civil defence documentary'⁴⁶ drawn up by the COI (Central Office of Information) in which *Protect and Survive* would be an annex to the overall publicity. There were also plans to merge civil defence into one briefing document, covering all nuclear and civil issues.⁴⁷ However, the COI was eventually cut out of the process of producing the new civil defence publicity and in 1986 the contract for civil defence was considered to be one that was to be conducted directly between an advertising agency and the Home Office, with COI removed as a central

⁴⁰Grant, *After the Bomb*.

⁴¹Hennessy, *The Secret State*.

⁴²F6 was the department in the Home Office responsible for emergency planning.

⁴³*Review of Home Defence Planning*, briefing paper prepared for ministers, November 1981 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/980).

⁴⁴Plans for ministerial briefing pack (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1028).

⁴⁵Letter from the Ministry of Defence to A. Walmsley Esq. of the Home Office on September 19, 1983 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1028).

⁴⁶Plans for civil defence documentary (Central Office of Information Files, National Archives, INF6/2490).

⁴⁷The correspondence regarding this matter may be found in files of the COI of that year (Central Office of Information Files, National Archives, INF6/3490).

partner. By this stage, other difficulties had presented themselves in terms of even warning the general public about a nuclear attack. For example, the franchising/privatisation of the Independent Television Networks brought new doubts about what were already overtly optimistic plans to inform the UK public when to take shelter.⁴⁸ What did seem to finally emerge from this process in 1987 was a rarely seen, and never generally released, public information film *Should Disaster Strike*,⁴⁹ which makes barely a mention of nuclear civil defence issues.

As considered above, the Home Office found it extremely difficult to produce a new version of *Protect and Survive*, which would essentially be a political measure but which supposedly had some basis in pragmatic planning. The measures proposed, communal shelters, volunteering and an 'all hazards' approach to defence, were unworkable. However, outside of internal difficulties there are three main factors that explain this impasse. First, resistance to civil defence led by the actions of CND and local councils. Second, the countervailing perspectives of other government departments, particularly the Ministry of Defence. Third, government was coming to terms with the fact that population response to nuclear war would be more complex than the psychoanalytic models of previous decades had assumed, adding to the complexity of pre- and post-war planning. I will now consider each of these countervailing forces in turn.

Public pedagogies of resistance

Public pedagogies, the alternative cultural education, presented beyond government,⁵⁰ proved to be a more effective way of engaging public interest and debate than civil defence education. Moreover, and as is becoming clear as documents are being released in the National Archives, these alternatives to the government line on civil defence were not just oppositional to government policy but were being used as sounding boards by government itself to rewrite and reformulate civil defence policy in the 1980s. The government wanted to find out what CND thought about civil defence in order to craft future strategies, particularly as there was significant public agreement with some aspects of the CND position. Government were not just opposed to the messages portrayed in the BBC film *Threads* (which showed a grim and nihilistic vision of nuclear war and a view of *Protect and Survive* as less than useless) but wished to reinvent *Threads* to portray a positive view of civil defence. Government, or at least civil servants in the F6 division dealing with emergency planning in the Home Office, were accommodative, rather than simply resistant, to public opposition. Hence CND and other bodies did not (directly) 'stop' the Home Office from producing alternatives but rather paused and re-shaped this process. What had been seen as counter-cultural opposition by CND was now part of the mainstream, and this had changed the centrality of *Protect and Survive* for policy:

The major presentational difficulty that arose in the past with *Protect and Survive* – which was not initially intended for distribution before an emergency occurred – was that it was (deliberately) taken out of context. At the extreme, opponents with some

⁴⁸Correspondence between the Home Office and the Independent Broadcasting Authority (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO393/60).

⁴⁹*Should Disaster Strike: Civil Protection in Action*. Documentary short, London: John Gau Productions, 1987.

⁵⁰Sandlin et al., *Handbook of Public Pedagogy*.

success derided advice to paint windows and crawl under a mattress as the Government's total response to the threat of a nuclear attack. (Doubtless they will continue to try: but it will be less easy, if, as a present intended, 'Protect and Survive' advice is presented as an annex to the overall civil defence strategy).⁵¹

This meant redesigning policy so that Protect and Survive would remain as an adjunct to an 'all hazards' approach to emergency planning, which would also cover conventional disasters. However, despite this lower status for Protect and Survive there was still a belief that a similar campaign was necessary as the same document states:

54. Nuclear war emergency information will also be revised during 1986/87, involving the production of 15–20 short public information films for transmission on television, and linked press advertisements, both held for use in a war crisis situation.⁵²

In order to achieve the Home Office's vision to change civil defence F6 division had previously sent a brief to a number of advertising agencies who 'pitched' in 1986 to the Home Office, competing for a promotional budget for civil defence of £300,000. The briefing pack included not only Home Office materials such as *Protect and Survive*, but also materials from CND and local authority opponents of civil defence. In making a decision on which advertising agencies to appoint, realism in the face of public and counter-cultural opposition to civil defence was paramount. In stating reasons why the winning advertising agency (Waldron, Allen, Henry and Thompson Ltd) were chosen, the score sheet prepared by the Home Office considered that:

Officials felt that Waldron had thought more deeply about the problems than either of their competitors.... They showed a healthy realism about the problems of public apathy/fatalism and attack from government critics and were slightly more guarded about the all hazards approach than the others.⁵³

Hence this particular agency was chosen for two reasons that were amenable to the Home Office. First, they shared the Home Office's pessimistic assessment of the ways in which the public mood had been shaped by counter-cultural assessments of civil defence. Second, they were receptive to a continuation of nuclear civil defence of a similar nature to Protect and Survive.

Waldron, Allen, Henry and Thompson planned a re-launch of civil defence⁵⁴ that would involve literature and other print material, a documentary film, media advertising and a corporate identity. This was a multi-hazard approach, but still kept the

⁵¹Document produced by the Home Office Public Relations Branch entitled 'Civil defence information and publicity programme: brief for the advisory committee on advertising, COI and competing advertising agencies', January 13, 1986: 17. (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1024),

⁵²Ibid.: 20.

⁵³Agency presentations to the F6 division (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1024).

⁵⁴Strategy recommendation for civil defence, May 1, 1986 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1024).

emphasis on nuclear war whilst allowing for other attack possibilities such as chemical attack.⁵⁵ In designing their new strategy the objections of critics to civil defence were at the forefront. A number of letters had been received by the Home Office from local authorities concerning the planning assumptions underlying the new Civil Defence Regulations, which are detailed in government circulars ES1/1981 and ES2/1981. These include letters from Ogwr Borough Council (on behalf of a request from Mid Glamorgan CND), the Chief Executive from the Royal Borough of Hounslow, Greater Manchester Council, the Greater London Council, London Borough of Hackney, Northern Ireland Office, West Lothian District Council and the London Borough of Hillingdon.⁵⁶ In terms of this response by local authorities Waldron considered that:

Response by local authorities to these regulations (for civil defence) has been mixed, ranging from enthusiastic implementation, through grudging acceptance, to outright refusal ... [we need to] ... create a public awareness of the need for an effective programme of Civil Defence. In so doing it will be possible to engender a climate of opinion which will encourage or make it easier for local authorities to implement the new statutory regulations.⁵⁷

CND were also visited as part of the Waldron research (but the agency did not declare that it was undertaking research as part of the Home Office). The report claims that CND had the perspective that civil defence comprised:

A network of Regional Emergency Committees to carry out the following measures:

- controlling movement on main roads from the cities, preventing civilian evacuation and keeping things clear for the military and police;
- cutting off the phones, isolating friends and relatives;
- arresting and threatening people who oppose the moves towards war;
- taking over the stocks of food, petrol and drugs;
- moving Government Ministers, officials and military commanders to protected bunkers.⁵⁸

Although local authority 'nuclear free zones' and CND had shaped what the Home Office and their commissioned advertising agency felt was possible in terms of civil defence, popular representations of nuclear war and civil defence had also altered their policy. In response to the film *Threads* the Home Office considered that it should make its own film to counter the hellish depiction of nuclear survival, perhaps an upbeat version of *Threads*:

A preference was expressed to have a film available which would show surviving pockets of communities, with perhaps a small proportion suffering from radiation sickness, where there was much more scope for the services of well trained Local

⁵⁵This topic is not explored here, but papers in the file HO322/966 consider as early as 1981 that citizens should be given advice against chemical attack. NATO anticipated that a chemical attack by the Warsaw Pact would initiate nuclear weapons protocols and would be the endgame of a tactical war in Europe.

⁵⁶Letters from local authorities (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/997).

⁵⁷Strategy for civil defence: 5 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/997).

⁵⁸Strategy recommendation for civil defence: 31–32 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/997).

Authorities, emergency services, and voluntary organisations to play a constructive part in the recovery purposes.⁵⁹

This was also the view of some local authorities:

The wartime post holders in one of the West Sussex districts have recently been shown the film *Threads* as part of their briefing and commented after the showing that they thought there should be a similar film but based on a surviving area to show the need for local authority action.⁶⁰

This had an impact upon the chosen strategy and in the report from Waldron, Allen, Henry and Thompson they considered that:

The reactions to the nuclear issue were clearly deep-rooted and based on emotional rather than rational response. Concepts like 'The Nuclear Winter' or 'The 4 Minute Warning' are widely known and feared but little understood thanks to films like 'Threads' or 'The Day After' (which had audiences of 7.5M and 10M respectively). These fears are the 'bogeymen' of the nuclear generation. Any campaign of information which seeks to break down these fears by rational debate will have an uphill struggle.⁶¹

The view was also shared between the Home Office and other government departments such as the COI. In a preliminary Home Office paper to COI it was considered that:

a sizeable majority regards the government's protective policy as inadequate, but also believes that there is little point in trying to improve things given that most people will be killed anyway. It is a view which accords with anecdote and common sense inference. If this does correctly reflect public opinion then it is an opinion nourished on sustained, skilful and well-organised propaganda by the CND, SANA and anti nuclear local authorities. But it springs from the Government's lack of a credible policy for defending the civilian population against nuclear attack. Anything called 'civil defence' in this context is almost inevitably regarded as a charade.⁶²

In response, the COI considered⁶³ that the target audience was 'the general public' segmented into CD (Civil Defence) activists, supporters, neutral middle ground, anti-CD/nuclear (not activists) and anti-CD/nuclear activists. They also considered 'local authorities' divided into 'those who cooperate and agree', 'cooperate but neutral/disagree' and 'non-cooperators [*sic*]' ('nuclear free zone LAs'). Hence CND and the anti-civil defence movement had influenced even the market segmentation for the proposed campaign.

As the above texts have indicated, the Home Office was still committed to producing a civil defence policy against nuclear attack. Rather than choose an advertising agency that de-emphasised the threat of nuclear war they chose the one that would continue with the nuclear narrative alongside other forms of civil defence. Hence the critics of the Home Office did not completely displace the development

⁵⁹Divisional note from F6 division, Home Office, January 17, 1985 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1024).

⁶⁰Letter from West Sussex County Council, February 12, 1985 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1024).

⁶¹Strategy recommendation on civil defence: 12 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1024).

⁶²Civil defence publicity, July 4, 1985 (Central Office of Information files, National Archives, INF6/3490).

⁶³COI Aide Memoire/points for discussion (Central Office of Information Files, National Archives, INF6/3490).

of civil defence from the agenda (however, they may have stalled this sufficiently so as to achieve this objective anyway, at least up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989). What may surprise these critics was that they had a significant influence on the development of civil defence and that their views were taken seriously in the design of public education for civil defence in the 1980s. CND materials were utilised in government briefs and CND was explicitly, if surreptitiously, consulted about its objections. Local government objections were seen as a barrier that could be overcome rather than an insurmountable blockage to civil defence efforts. The film *Threads* was used in civil defence training by at least one county council and was seen by the Home Office as a template for improvement in terms of providing a different message.

Rather than preventing the development of a successor to Protect and Survive, critics stalled the process whilst the Home Office developed a more oblique strategy, retaining a nuclear emphasis, around civil defence. However, the Home Office faced a more formidable foe than CND or the local councils in the development of a new Protect and Survive: other government departments, as explained in the next section.

Two tribes: the Home Office and other government departments

As discussed, during the 1980s the Home Office sought to change civil defence policy to include the possibility of deep shelter and evacuation as well as the need to protect the public against multiple attacks and hazards. In educative terms this was to expand the advice contained within Protect and Survive to include attacks by chemical and conventional weapons. Evidence of this arises from consideration of the proposed revisions of the successor to Protect and Survive, but there are early indications that the Home Office wished to increase the scope of risk factors covered by civil defence.⁶⁴

However, the Cabinet considered that exposing the public to options such as evacuation in the event of a nuclear strike would lead to difficulties with other areas of war planning. This can be seen in various meetings of cabinet committees. From the meeting of the Official Committee on Home Defence in 1983⁶⁵ they considered that, although self-evacuation would occur, 'movements of population would seriously impede essential civilian and military tasks in tension and war'. This reflects previous disquiet concerning public information on civil defence. The Official Committee on Home Defence, the Home Defence Planning Sub-Committee, considered the need for improved civil defence, but also the implications of this for nuclear deterrence:

The presentation of civil defence policy would be improved by public perception of a scheme clearly intended to reduce death and injury. This might result in greater acceptance of the need for and merit of peacetime civil defence planning. On the other hand, there are substantial difficulties which should not be underestimated. The next 12 months are likely to be critical for public confidence in the Government's defence policy. The announcement of a departure from stayput [*sic*] and the start of evacuation planning would so raise the profile of civil defence as to cause increasing public scepticism as to deterrence and as to the assessment of the low risk of a European war. Detailed

⁶⁴Letter from J.A. Howard of F6 division to R.F. Cooke Esq. of the UKWMO, of July 15, 1981 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/996).

⁶⁵Cabinet document from the Official Committee on Home Defence, Planned Evacuations Options, January 24, 1983: 4 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/998).

evacuation planning would mean the disclosure of likely targets, associating them in the public mind with danger rather than with their contribution to national security. In the light of experience at Greenham Common, the United States might be concerned about the further focusing of public attention on their UK installations.⁶⁶

This desire to stall the decision for public information was further reflected in the minutes of a 1982 sub-committee on evacuation:

in view of the highly sensitive defence climate likely in 1983 Ministers will also wish to consider deferring their decision on any of the schemes or other courses of action. This involves taking a calculated risk that the international situation will not deteriorate sharply during 1983.⁶⁷

As well as official committees, and the Cabinet, it is clear that government ministries other than the Home Office had their own objections, connected to geopolitical positioning, to an expansion of civil defence education:

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE said that the political dangers of announcing work on an evacuation scheme should be underlined in the report to Ministers. The next twelve months would be critical for the Government's nuclear policy with the arrival in this country of the first cruise missiles. The announcement that the government was considering a policy of evacuation would be particularly damaging to the credibility of that policy. Officials should steer Ministers towards postponing any overt work on evacuation planning for the next year.⁶⁸

At the same meeting, the Ministry of Defence also gave its objections:

THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE said that, following last week's leaks in the press, they had briefed their Ministers on the work being done on evacuation policy. They would be unhappy about any major shifts in policy over the coming year. Any move that would associate nuclear deterrence, and particularly American nuclear weapons based in the United Kingdom, with danger rather than with security in the public mind would be unwelcome.⁶⁹

As can be seen by the above evidence, the Home Office F6 division faced some criticism from other government departments in terms of civil defence drawing attention to other critical aspects of military policy and geopolitical stance. This made the task of revising Protect and Survive more difficult.

Rethinking population response to nuclear war: the 'difficult' subject and pedagogical fit

The third reason why there was little progress in reforming Protect and Survive in this period is concerned with, if not political pressures, a change in the disciplinary orientations of mass psychology towards a cognitive and clinical approach to looking at population response. This presented a difficult challenge to policy-makers who faced a citizenry who would, it was believed, behave rationally in the run-up to

⁶⁶Official Committee on Home Defence, Home Defence Planning Sub-committee, minutes of meeting held on December 21, 1982 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/998).

⁶⁷December 1982 Cabinet official committee on home defence options (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/988).

⁶⁸Home Defence Planning Sub-committee, December 14, 1982 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/998).

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

a nuclear attack. This rationality would sit uneasily with official advice as people undertook behaviours such as fleeing the site of expected nuclear strikes (known in official jargon as 'self-evacuation') and stockpiling food for long periods ('hoarding'), hence using their rational cognitive processes to make judgements. This was in contrast to the possible effects of a nuclear attack on post-attack psychology where clinical psychology emphasised trauma, stress and anxiety disorder on a wide basis. In short, in considering mass population response to nuclear war there was a movement from a psychodynamic perspective in the early 1950s and 1960s with a psychoanalytical model of predicting individual behaviour to a more cognitive and clinical model of individual group behaviour in the 1970s and 1980s. This made it difficult for the Home Office to reconcile population response with the didactic pedagogical advice in *Protect and Survive*. Rather than a psychodynamic subject who would look to authority (the government) in times of crisis, subjects became 'difficult' to manage. Predicting how the population en masse would respond to a nuclear attack was obviously complex and the British state commissioned a number of reports in putting together a picture of this.

The earliest government data on how a population might respond to a nuclear attack came from the War Office.⁷⁰ In a 1958 report, the effects are considered to be purely physical with little consideration of behavioural or cognitive response resulting from attack other than people affected by flash blindness, who may become a 'nuisance'. Another document consulted by the War Office was a NATO confidential report.⁷¹ In terms of social organisation, the NATO report suggests that in areas of heavy damage there would be inaction whereas more capable survivors might be in a 'state of heightened suggestibility' with the formation of 'local leaders'. There might also be 'irrational hostility' towards authority. There would also be 'the spreading of rumours', which may 'cause panic'. The report uses a psychodynamic model of mass population response to nuclear attack:

a near miss experience shatters ego-defences, in particular the feeling of personal invulnerability, and that a remote-miss experience strengthens this feeling ... by analogy with conditioning, fear is reinforced in near-miss experiences and extinguished in remote-miss experiences.⁷²

This psychodynamic model produced a strong steer to the state to act as a central voice (in Freudian terms 'the superego') in reducing the fear of citizens.

In contrast to this psychodynamic approach, which used case-study data, in the 1970s and 1980s there was a move towards using experimental and clinical studies to ascertain mass population response. On behalf of the Home Office, Sally Leivesley, with other authors, was asked to consider the various psychological responses to the threat and actuality of nuclear attack. In the summary of their paper *Population Response to War*, Sally Leivesley and Jane Hogg consider that the UK would not automatically recover. In their summary they state:

⁷⁰Nuclear attack and warning systems: a preliminary study of the data available from the AORG tactical war game on the warning problem (War Office files, National Archives, WO291/2194).

⁷¹Studies of disaster and their value for predicting behaviour under nuclear attack (War Office Files, National Archives, WO291/2309).

⁷²Ibid.

It is concluded that with a weight of attack of 300 megatons the prospects for social and economic regeneration are very much in the balance.⁷³

Some of their report is positive regarding the need to educate the population prior to a nuclear attack. They state that:

As a result of the denial that occurs during the threat period prior to strike certain groups within the population may not take shelter, provide for an extended period of survival or heed warnings of radiological and other unseen hazards. Education of the population in peacetime on the dangers of a nuclear strike and methods of protection would to some extent overcome this denial.⁷⁴

They consider that there will be reasonably rational reactions by the population to nuclear attack: for example, that hoarding would be common as a rational reaction to preparing for nuclear war⁷⁵ and that the population would engage in self-recovery activity.⁷⁶ The population would also engage in 'self-evacuation' as a spontaneous activity⁷⁷ but would not panic:

The main recommendation is that the image of panic be dismissed from the minds of the planners at central government and those officers with designated wartime duties in regional and local governments. Attention is drawn to the fact that there were similar fears about public behaviour prior to World War II. However, the World War II Bombing studies suggest that panic, if it existed, was extremely limited.⁷⁸

However, despite this rationality there would be clinical implications of nuclear war on a massive scale, resulting in difficulties in terms of national recovery:

A condition known as the Disaster Syndrome is suffered by survivors of disasters, and manifests itself as anxiety or depression in either mild or severe forms ... where loss of life is >70 pc, 90 pc would have disaster syndrome.⁷⁹

In some ways, these reports supported the direction of travel of the Home Office. For example, Leivesley supported the concept of public education prior to a nuclear attack, evacuation and even deep shelter, which were proposed as part of the successor to Protect and Survive. However, the tone of Protect and Survive, and perhaps even the successor to Protect and Survive, was extremely didactic, which did not fit easily with the conception of an aware, and rational, subject. Moreover, Leivesley's thoughts on the clinical reaction to a nuclear attack were bleak, emphasising that the majority of the population would suffer from clinical depression and other symptoms. This would have made mobilisation of the labour force into rebuilding and agriculture extremely difficult. Leivesley was prepared to consider

⁷³'Population response to war', January 22, 1982, summary (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1044).

⁷⁴*Ibid.*: 1.

⁷⁵A brief discussion of the implications of hoarding for post-attack recovery. Sally Leivesley, September 14, 1981 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1044).

⁷⁶An analysis of self-help and informal voluntary activity in Britain post-attack. Sally Leivesley, draft no. 5, September 15, 1981 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/10044).

⁷⁷'Population Response to War', January 22, 1982: 2 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1044).

⁷⁸'Response to Danger: Panic in the Community', Sally Leivesley, August 28, 1981 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1044).

⁷⁹'Population Response to War', January 22, 1982: 5 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1044).

the nightmare scenario that the Home Office would not: the collapse of the UK as a functioning state. Indeed, to mobilise such a depressed and disgruntled population the Home Office, in other documents, was considering draconian options such as martial law and the reintroduction of the death penalty.⁸⁰

Conclusion

The lack of progress during this period seems to be compatible with Thelen's institutional conception of change. Having made public *Protect and Survive* in 1980 it became increasingly difficult to revise or reinvent public education for civil defence in the United Kingdom. However, this was by no means due to institutional inertia or 'stickiness'. Rather, the government department responsible for civil defence in the United Kingdom (the Home Office) was continually attempting to revise civil defence, albeit for political purposes. Its failure to do so, even in a period of extreme geopolitical tension, was largely due to the countervailing forces at the time. The public pedagogies of CND were absorbed within mainstream popular culture, local government was unwilling to cooperate, scientific advice ran contrary to the proposed information, and the publication of advice was against the strategic priorities of the Ministry of Defence. This meant that the 'contested nature of institutional development'⁸¹ and its 'political dynamics'⁸² were of the utmost importance. Perhaps CND, and the anti-nuclear lobby, would not have had as much purchase at the time were it not for the institutional interlocking between their opposition to public civil defence and that of other departments such as the MOD. In addition, new models of the rational subject produced a theory of the citizen that was very different from the passive learner assumed by *Protect and Survive*.

Path dependence means that, even when there is political will by a department to change policy, there may be institutional interdependencies that work against change. As has also been seen, civil society has a central role in delaying, or changing, the form of disaster education. CND and critics of civil defence had a very powerful role in delaying and subverting Home Office intentions. Interestingly, CND and fellow travellers worked *in* the interest of some government departments that were opposed to the Home Office policies, such as the MOD. Institutions with radically different objectives became 'locked in' to a common purpose and '*Protect and Survive*' was to disappear from British civil defence policy. Its contemporary relevance now is only as a bizarre relic of popular culture from the 1980s.⁸³

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [Grant number: ES/K000233/1].

Notes on contributor

John Preston is Professor of Education in the Cass School of Education and Communities, University of East London. He is currently an ESRC Global Uncertainties Leadership Fellow.

⁸⁰Research Programme on law and order after a nuclear strike, paper by Jane Hogg, January 28, 1985 (Home Office Papers, National Archives, HO322/1008).

⁸¹Thelen, *How Institutions Evolve*, 31.

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³In a 2003 Channel 4 poll of the 100 greatest 'scary moments', *Protect and Survive* came 89th, *The 100 Greatest Scary Moments*, Tyne Tees Television, October 25, 2003.